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Tyler Michaud: Abstract and Synthesis

Abstract: The second chapter of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, by Rick Wormeli, explored the idea of mastery vs. non-mastery using the the six facets of learning: mastery is not simply interpreting but the development of a skill, while non-mastery can be as simple as momentary internalization for the sake of an exam. If a students has truly [mastered](#) a skill then they will be able to demonstrate proficiency with the six facets of understanding, modeled in *Understanding by Design* by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, those being: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge.

Synthesis: One of the ideas I think our class agreed on was that learning is not simply the teacher's responsibility, nor the students', but a mutual effort between them. However, to develop mastery it is absolutely crucial that the educator knows what they want their students to master and why; how will the students benefit from the material both presently and two years from now? If the teacher wants the students to develop a mastery of the topic then he must understand the variations in intelligences, and the needs of every [individual](#). Likewise, it is unrealistic to expect students to develop a deep understanding of something foreign to them simply by writing it in a notebook, "Relating skills and material to real life application helps students and teachers to become masters, and maintain mastery for a long time." (Matt Potter) Mastery is the ability to apply the material to something larger, not just mindless regurgitation; as Russel Warren said, "Yes, I need my students to understand what a part of speech is and what the definition of each is, but if they can't apply that information, it's useless to them (besides getting a good grade on a test)." Additionally, as Mike Diffin said beautifully, "The simple acquisition of the knowledge is not enough though. It is the acquisition of knowledge colloquially with the use of the knowledge in both the situation that it is necessary for as well as in other situations where it can be helpful and necessary knowledge to push forward." By appealing to the varied learning styles it should create an environment in which mastery comes more easily. Furthermore, if teachers collaborate with administrators, colleagues, and other professionals they might develop a better idea of establishing mastery. However, how are you going to assess mastery? As aforementioned meeting with other teachers is a great idea, but what else? By incorporating real-world projects and situations into the class it will help judge mastery: for example, rather than writing a persuasive essay hold a class-wide debate on a current hot-button topic (be cautious though)!

Michael Diffin

The second chapter in *Fair Isn't Always Equal* is about the mastery of the subject at hand. Between the student and the teacher there is a need to prove genuine learning and then mastery of the subject. How do we prove the mastery of any subject? Can we ask one question that compiles everything? This is unfortunately not a good idea. If it is the goal of the teacher to prove genuine learning and mastery of the subject that the teacher must provide many outlets to the student for them to prove that they have learned the subject effectively. The simple acquisition of the knowledge is not enough though. It is the acquisition of knowledge colloquially with the use of the knowledge in both the situation that it is necessary for as

well as in other situations where it can be helpful and necessary knowledge to push forward. There are many indicators as to what is and is not god definitions of mastery. There are also lines as t what is important to master in the first place within the content area. There are many outlets in which we must use to find out what are the necessary things to master within our specific content areas.

Chapter

Mastery is a new concept which can be used to be a teacher of mastery. There is not one student that will walk through your door that does not have the desire to master at least one thing, and although it may not be everything to do with your subject, so they think, it is our job to make it so. This chapter [2] of the book is all about the student's mastery of a content area. He states that it is important not to have a student study and pass a test, but actually master the art of the content and be able to use it beyond the classroom. I believe that differentiated instruction can play a big role in mastery, whatever way to teach a student how to master a subject that compares it to something the student is already passionate about. This chapter describes multiple ways of assessing one's mastery of a subject. Tests, projects, and other assessment ideas can be used in my opinion. Writing assessing mastery should be added in the hands of the students themselves. The reason that some students do not do well with tests, and other do not do well with presentations. One thing a teacher of mine did once was to let us do a group project, which included a presentation, as well as each person in the group had to write a paper on the project. The paper was basically the project presentation written out in our own

words. Both were graded, however, whenever we did better or use the one when on our final grade assessment. Say I got a B on the presentation and a B on the paper, the presentation would be 10% of my overall grade, but the paper would be 90%, and the other way around if that's the way the grades were. I think this is a great idea because everyone is assessed in the same way, but also, it is individualized for those who feel more comfortable doing a presentation and those who are writers.

Ashley Godbout

Chapter 2 discusses mastery and what true understanding and knowledge means to teachers. The author explains that mastery is not an echo or recitation of content. Instead of repeating information, mastery uses newly learned information and breaks content down into pieces, explains it, and uses it in new situations. A great example of mastery is the six facets of understanding: explain it, interpret it, apply it, practice perspective and empathy, and show self-knowledge. A student truly understands a concept when they can show expertise in each of these aspects in a discipline. Evidence of mastery is shown by multiple assessments and assignments and by tracking student progress over time. I liked the part in this chapter where the author says that students can explain understanding orally and written, however written responses show errors and misunderstandings that oral answers don't reveal. This is because student body language and vocal tone can cover up areas of thinking that are incorrect. Whether right or wrong, writing shows levels of mastery that can't be shown in other ways.

"Each year we're always deciding what to prune and what to keep, when to just introduce verses when to push for mastery, and what constitutes mastery—all of these can vary from teacher to teacher. Curriculum is subject to a teacher's interpretation. (pg 18). This phrase from the author is so important to remember and embrace as future teachers. If teachers focus less on what everyone else is doing and concentrate on what's important for their classes and students then students will be more successful. As long as the students meet the current standards necessary for their grade level then teachers should be able to tweak the curriculum how they feel necessary.

Tyler Michaud

The second chapter of *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, by Rick Wormeli, focused on the importance of student understanding and mastery of information provided. It is important to note the difference between mastery and memorization (non-mastery): mastery is interpreting and understanding as a way to make use of information gained, while memorizing is merely momentary internalization for the purpose of recitation. In *Understanding by Design* the authors, Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe, provide the six facets of learning: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. Wormeli uses these facets to explain the difference between mastery and non-mastery of knowledge. As a student, I know very well the difference between mastery and learning; mastery is when I am able to use those skills a week later without a refresher. The idea of mastery vs. non-mastery should constantly be burning in the back of every teachers' mind. Additionally, as the teacher it is crucial to understand why

you want your students develop an understanding and mastery of what you teach. How will it help them? Would their time be better spent elsewhere? After deciding on teaching the lesson, the educator must be able to assess the level of mastery in the classroom, using the six facets of learning can help monitor classroom success. Ultimately, a teacher's success is not measured solely by their lesson or the amount of students that like them, but rather the percentage of mastered material.

Matt Potter

While reading this chapter I learned that student who understand things may or may not have a true mastery. This chapter talks a lot about mastery, and what it means to have mastery. In math for example a student who can factor, simplify, and do simple addition and subtraction are thought to understand what they are doing, but do they? As a teacher we can assume that a student knows something until we do a little digging. A student may solve a problem in textbook fashion but this doesn't prove his/her mastery. To my understanding mastery comes with repetition, of many applications. A student can't master a topic by doing it just once. Relating skills and material to real life application helps students and teachers to become masters, and maintain mastery for a long time. As we know all students are different, and this applies to a student's mastery as well. We have to start somewhere, and for mastery we begin with analysis and evaluation of a students understanding. Over time understanding evolves into application, and when this occurs, mastery has been achieved.

In my classroom I plan to describe to my students what mastery is, and work with them to achieve it. I will give my students various exercises in different shapes, sizes which all relate to a skill I want my students to master. Providing many application assignments after many practice assignments will help my student get the repetition they need. Ultimately it will help them master the subject due to lots of practice, and application. Along the way I will through in questions and material meant to be understood. As an educator I want my students to ask questions, by doing this I hope to further engage my students in the task at hand. All in all I will prepare myself in many ways that will ease the process, and help me be more effective in the way I present subject matter; this will help my students be more successful.

Christopher Vogel

Chapter 2 discusses the primary difference between mastery and understanding. According to the book, a student can have understanding of the content but have difficulty putting it into practice because they have not mastered the practical application. Vogel explains that a student might be able to recite multiple of nine up to twelve but be unable to solve a complex math problem that has multiple levels of addition, subtraction and multiplication. This discussion of mastery ties in with having multiple assessments. Just because I can answer a multiple choice question does not accurately test my mastery of the history of the US. This chapter brings into perspective making sure my students will be able to use the knowledge that I teach them effectively in the real world. The chapter also talks about regarding the knowledge and understanding that comes from a goal. As a teacher I should be able to equate the benchmarks or standards that are provided for my subject. The book provides the examples of recognizing current class, identifying another's progress, and using background information to make sense of new material. Though there are only words for some topics, the concept will be critical to use all of the benchmarks and standards that I will need the students to master. The closing of the chapter focuses on teacher keeping

their minds open to new ways of thinking or perspective over the material being studied on. A student should never limit his learning or progress to his own knowledge and should be open to the different ways a student learns the material as he learned the material.

Chris Phillips

The focus throughout chapter two of Wormeli's *Fair Isn't Always Equal* is that of mastering content and the most effective manners of guiding students in such directions. The chapter explains that students can be and are gauged on productivity with the content through assessment and by perceived mastery of it.

While it is defined consistently, I still find mastery a subjective term. A book that formerly details differentiated instruction and catering to individual need, *FIAE* goes on to imply that student worth can be measured through understood accomplishment. While it does offer various means of getting there and the most effective ways of making sure students do reach the implied level of mastery, it is a foreign concept to me that anyone's worth should be so subject to a term likely to intimidate and discourage.

If we are lifelong learners, and if we are perennial students, then mastery need not and does not apply. Our content areas as secondary professionals will graduate in intensity depending on grade level and perceived abilities of any given class, but any and all classes serve as stepping stones to discovery, and as little else. Mastery of content implies an end, while learning never should. Wormeli posits, through *FIAE*, an image of mastery which I, perhaps, am giving less credit to than is deserved, because it *is* one of understanding and relative compassion, but it is important not to deter students from learning by intimidation, and it is important not to deter teachers from teaching because of implied, wrongful direction.

Ashley Libby

This chapter explained that knowing what defines mastery is essential in understanding if your students are truly learning and understanding the material. What defines mastery is different for every teacher and also does depend on how long they have been teaching for. There are many ways to assess if your students have learned the material but does that really prove if they have mastered it? Mastery is more than knowing and using what has been taught to them but it is also being able to create their own problems using what has been taught to them. This chapter compared mastery to the six facets created by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins in their book *Understanding by Design*. The six facets are: Explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. These are all things that students are supposed to be able to do with the information they are getting from their teachers.

As a teacher, I am supposed to not only assess my students' progress but I am supposed to make sure that they can take the information I've provided and use it outside of the classroom. As a new teacher I will have to keep in mind what I am teaching my students because there are many factors that play a role in the school curriculum. I have to keep in mind if my material is in line with the state standard tests and also know that there is more information than there is time in a school year. This is something that not only first year teachers have to know but that experienced teachers must also remind themselves of.

Russell Warren

As I surmised from reading Chapter 1, Rick Wormeli is not only hoping for classrooms to be flexible – he wants these practices to help the students succeed and master their subjects. One of the things that, thinking as a teacher, makes me livid, is how absolutely saturated our education culture is in testing and scores. Just because a student can get a good grade, or fill in a bubble well enough, does not mean that student truly *knows* how to apply that information if given the task to do so. That's how I define mastery, similarly to how Wormeli does. He says, in a specific, ELA example, that mastery is when “the student can point to any word in the sentence and explain its role, and explain how the word may change its role,

depending on where it's placed in the sentence" (p. 13). Yes, I need my students to understand what a part of speech is and what the definition of each is, but if they can't apply that information, it's useless to them (besides getting a good grade on a test). Differentiation aids in this, allowing me to try and tweak the classroom and my teaching to aid the students in what I deem to be proper understanding. This practice will also make it easier to students to acquire that knowledge, other than them trying to make their brains work in a fashion they don't naturally, and then trying to simply remember the information and not master it.

Meghan Hughes

There is a distinct difference between being able to complete a task, and understanding how or why the outcome is what it is. As educators, we must focus too much on the ability to complete a task with the right answer because standardized tests do not take the amount of work into account. Demonstrating the process and checking for actual understanding will be the key to the students maintaining the ability to complete a specific task later in the future. The author writes, "students have mastered content when they demonstrate a thorough understanding as evidence by doing something substantive with the content beyond merely echoing it. Anyone can repeat information; it's the masterful student who can break content into its component pieces, explain it and alternative perspectives regarding it cogently to others, and use it purposefully in new situations." The example given by the author referencing the ability to make successful passes in a basketball game, is a great comparison. If the player does not understand the game in a way that he/she understands the use of each pass, the player will always make the same pass regardless of the outcome. Much like if a student does not understand the purpose and the steps of a task, he/she will not be able to make proper adjustments throughout the process to complete the task successfully.

Tyler Brown

Around the 6th century CE, the Civil Service Exam revolutionized the bureaucracies of the Sui Dynasty in China. The exam was mostly centered around complete memorization or "mastery" of the 4 ancient Confucian texts. The exam only tested one's knowledge of the content, not their abilities of application. Apparently it has only taken 1500 years for the educational system to understand that this concept of mastery is a fallacy. As alluded to in this chapter of FIAE, McTighe and Wiggins have it right in their book *Understanding by Design* that lists 6 facets of true understanding: Explanation, Interpretation, Application, Perspective, Empathy, and Self-Knowledge. In order to achieve true mastery over a given content area, one must be able to portray their understanding using these 6 facets. This idea is fortified in what we have read recently about proper forms of assessment. We assess in different ways during different waypoints in our lessons in order to get a better picture of our individual student's levels of mastery over the content. Understanding where they are in regards to mastery of the content is essential in planning for the eventual decisive assessments that will either enhance or hinder our schools, us as teachers, and (as is always most important) our students' futures.

Devin Boilard

This chapter lays before its reader a rather complicated question, how can one decipher when a student

has mastered a skill and when they have not? First one must ask what it means to have mastered a skill. While this question fields many different responses the general consensus is that mastery is evident when students can break apart the content and analyze its parts, a base knowledge is present but most importantly an underlying understanding of how the components work together and with other ideas is essential. Interlaced with this question of mastery is expression, for evidence of mastery to be valid a teacher must provide the appropriate opportunities for the knowledge to be expressed. A classroom that only provides multiple-choice exams will never provide an opportunity for a student to express their own personal understanding. While the method in which the assessment is delivered is important, so too are the amount of opportunities given. One example of mastery is often not enough to secure that a student possess the correct understanding. Multiply examples of a student's skillset should be gathered to show a consistent and verifiable level of mastery.

I really struggle when it comes to the assessment of students and the role I will play as evaluator. While I understand the interpretation of mastery that is outlined in this chapter I still feel the subjective nature of the situation is too strong. Having the skill of remaining unbiased and yet very conscious of distinguishing skill versus effort will be a challenge for me. While I imagine that time behind the desk will be one of the most effective modes of training my ability to assess I must remain aware of the issue and constantly be on the lookout for ways to better educate myself on the matter.
